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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 001539

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DEPT FOR G/TIP, INL, DRL, NEA/RA, NEA/ARP, L/DL

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TAGS: PREL PHUM KCRM ELAB UN AE

SUBJECT: MIXED PICTURE FROM ACTIVISTS ON UAE ANTI-TIP
EFFORTS

Classified by CDA Martin Quinn, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Recent conversations with Ansar Burney (head of a Pakistani trust who focuses on the camel jockey issue in the UAE) and Sharla Musabih (who runs a shelter for abused women in Dubai), highlight the complex nature of the TIP problem in the UAE, as well as positive yet limited official efforts to combat trafficking. Both activists acknowledge that much remains to be done to identify the true scope of the problem, heighten awareness in public and official circles, strengthen the legislative framework to combat trafficking, and assist victims. At the same time, both acknowledge that the UAEG is taking measured steps in the right direction. Musabih is in fact joining hands with Dubai officials to pursue her goals, hoping to press for progress by teaming up with some of the very officials whose approach she seeks to change. End summary.

Ansar Burney: How many jockeys were there anyway?

¶2. (C) On August 14, Burney reviewed with the Charge and PolChief his involvement in the camel jockey issue and said the repatriation of 1,077 children and the provision of \$9 million to UNICEF for their resettlement and education were positive steps but not the ultimate solution. He claimed the drama is somewhat more complex and tragic. He suggested that children are still "used" in the camel industry, including in races held away from the public eye. He went so far as to suggest that senior sheikhs are never seen viewing camel races with robot jockeys because they "were enjoying the misery" of a human cargo bouncing along on animals.

¶3. (C) Recalling that the UAE Minister of Interior (MoI) had once estimated the number of young camel jockeys in the UAE at "2 to 3 thousand," Burney said his own estimates had been over 5,000 (virtually all non-UAE nationals). The repatriation of 1,077 is therefore helpful but far from sufficient. Burney added that many of those repatriated had simply returned to dismal economic circumstances and were prone to influence by extremist Islamic thought through the madrassas in Pakistan -- to which some of the returned boys had been farmed out. He called for stronger oversight of post-repatriation education assistance (implying that funds were either misused by the families or not disbursed).

¶4. (C) Note: The Pakistani Community Welfare Attaché told PolOff September 5 that he estimates possibly 1,000 young foreign boys still involved in the camel-raising industry, although not necessarily as jockeys. He echoed concerns that funds dispersed to repatriated jockeys needed careful oversight; he was convinced that funds were indeed distributed as promised, but not necessarily spent in the

best interests of the boys. End note.

Questioning UAE sincerity

¶5. (C) Burney said a 2005 HBO documentary on the plight of the camel jockeys (in which he featured prominently) had attracted the attention of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ), who had along with MoI Sheikh Seif bin Zayed requested Burney's help to combat the menace. Shelters subsequently established at Zayed Military City housed approximately 300 rescued jockeys at one point, he said, although accountability was poor and some boys left the facility without a trace (presumably, in Burney's view, returned to influential sheikhs who had protested the boys' rescue from their camel camps). UNICEF played a key role in the sheltering and repatriation, said Burney, but had limited influence over the comings and goings of the boys. In spite of MbZ's apparent personal (and genuine) desire to rid the nation of this menace, Burney assessed that overall the UAE was taking limited actions and then only due to pressure from the USG and from him, and "not to please God."

¶6. (C) Referring to his own public support in late 2006 of the UAE in a recent court case against Dubai Ruler and UAE VP/Prime Minister Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum and his brother (and Finance Minister) Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid (a case dismissed for lack of jurisdiction in July 2007), Burney said senior UAE officials "seemed sincere" in enlisting his aid. He submitted positive letters about UAEG progress in addressing the problem, and withheld for the time being more "evidence" against them. Once the case was dismissed, however, he claimed the UAE quickly lost interest in cooperation. The UAE had been ready to "purchase" his help with promises of tackling the problem, he said, but were not

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in fact looking to "help the children."

¶7. (C) Elaborating on what "evidence" he might deploy in exposing the problem in the future, Burney said he had assisted a French media team in documenting ongoing abuses, yet held that film in reserve so as not to antagonize the UAEG until the timing seemed most useful. He spoke of the harsh punishments given to boys who did not wake up early and work hard, and the "almost daily" occurrence of boys falling from camels. He said boys were still being raced on camels in multiple emirates of the UAE, and that his team most recently witnessed a child in a race about six months ago.

Balancing rhetoric and reality

¶8. (C) Lamenting the disparity between official pronouncements and harsh reality in source countries, Burney said for example that the Government of Bangladesh claimed repatriation was going well when in fact the repatriated children were "miserable." He said some boys unfortunately preferred the UAE to life in their home countries. (Note: Burney is from Pakistan and reportedly visits Bangladesh and Mauritania, but has been unable to obtain a visa to explore post-repatriation circumstances in Sudan. He noted that in spite of limited access to UAE officials and data, he never had trouble entering the UAE. End note.)

¶9. (C) Comment: Ansar Burney has a strident message to share, and an interest in expanding the role (and funding) of his trust (Ansar Burney Trust International in Karachi), making him one of the loudest voices to decry the status of camel jockeys -- and that not always consistently, as seen in his temporary support of the UAE in fighting a court case in the U.S. when it seemed to his advantage. We have heard others in the Pakistani community express skepticism about his sincerity, viewing him as a "self promoter." His statements are conveniently exaggerated at times. That said, he was instrumental in pressing for steps heretofore

implemented and we should encourage him to continue the quest for more complete solutions. End comment.

¶10. (SBU) An August 23 article in the semi-official Arabic daily al-Ittihad highlighted a senior Pakistani official's praise of the UAE for the rehabilitation and repatriation of 650 former camel jockeys. The Pakistani MFA Director General gave his strong endorsement of UAE efforts in the article, which openly referred to "human smuggling" as the cause of the jockeys' plight. (Comment: Such straightforward jargon is rare in addressing TIP-related issues in the official press and suggests a growing acknowledgment of trafficking as a national issue. Manifestations of the UAE desire to address -- or at least be seen as serious in addressing -- TIP include the formation of a National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking; MoI-coordinated training seminars September 2-3 for police, criminal investigative division officers, immigration officials, and public prosecutors which reportedly explored ways to rehabilitate victims; the desire to host a UN conference which led to extensive preparation last fall, before the idea for a March 2007 conference was scrubbed partially for logistical reasons; and creation of the Dubai Foundation on Women and Children discussed below. End comment.)

¶11. (C) The Pakistani Embassy has expressed general satisfaction to PolChief on camel jockey repatriation, while acknowledging that a thousand or so may still be present in the UAE. The Community Welfare Attaché said September 5 that he had recently repatriated six jockeys completely unrelated to the UNICEF program. Additionally, we have learned from a local UN office of a tender issued by the UAEG for bids on a data base to link five countries involved in the camel jockey issue (presumably to better track the post-repatriation status of former jockeys), suggesting ongoing UAEG interest in ensuring that resettlement is implemented carefully.

A cautious yet hopeful voice in Dubai

¶12. (C) Sharla Musabih, an AmCit activist in Dubai who manages the City of Hope shelter for victims of abuse and trafficking, told PolOffs August 22 that officialdom was "investing in her" to improve its record on human rights. After what she calls "years of abuse and harassment," the Dubai authorities claim to understand the need for shelters like hers. Juma al-Mansouri of the Dubai Executive Office had invited her to merge her operations with an expanded "semi-government" initiative. Demanding that any cooperation

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be on her terms, she eventually agreed to work together -- reportedly crossing off names of potential board members for the new "Dubai Foundation on Women and Children" according to her sense of who might truly be helpful. The Foundation met September 5 for the first time.

¶13. (C) Expressing her cautious yet "excited" expectations of the new arrangement, Musabih said in late August that her aggressive and outspoken approach would continue as she cajoled police, prosecutors, and political figures to take a stronger stance in helping the disadvantaged. She sought to build up trust among official players to help the Foundation (which she still prefers to associate with the name "City of Hope" to build on her previous efforts) as it seeks to enhance Dubai's (and by extension the UAE's) expertise in identifying and assisting victims while prosecuting traffickers.

¶14. (C) Musabih also hoped that official sanction for her activities would help "validate" the efforts of other groups and individuals quietly engaged in similar work. By helping others step into the public eye without fear of official censure (admittedly a long-term and cautious process), she was hopeful that funding sources would increase along with public awareness of the magnitude of the problem. As for her

own funding, she said she never gave a second thought to money, as the 50 to 80 thousand dirhams needed monthly to run the City of Hope (roughly 14 to 20 thousand USD) always seemed to be available. Whatever the challenges of fund raising thus far, financing will likely be made easier in the future by official support from Dubai authorities. Pressed on whether the government's interest in her work is genuine or merely cosmetic, Musabih insisted that "they are getting it" and she anticipated a productive (if sometimes uncomfortably frank) relationship.

¶15. (SBU) Comment: The multi-faceted TIP dilemma has the attention of UAE authorities, who need ongoing pressure to pursue anti-TIP efforts in a systematic and enduring way. As post seeks to sort out the many voices involved and press the federal government (and emirate-level leaders) to step up its own action, we see potential partnerships between activists and officials particularly promising, as those active on the ground have data and context relevant to helping define effective pressure points. They can also speak out more comfortably in the media to intensify the pressure. This approach can be complementary to USG programs and TIP reports. End comment.

¶16. (U) This is a joint Abu Dhabi / Dubai cable.
QUINN